



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

AFGHANISTAN

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

April 15-April 30, 2009

DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

Afghan Women's Group Receives Award: On March 9, The Movement of Afghan Sisters (MAS) – an Afghan NGO founded with support from USAID – was honored with the 2009 Jeane J. Kirkpatrick Award in Washington, D.C. The award, presented by the International Republican Institute's Women's Democracy Network, celebrates those who have made outstanding contributions to the advancement of women in politics and civil society.

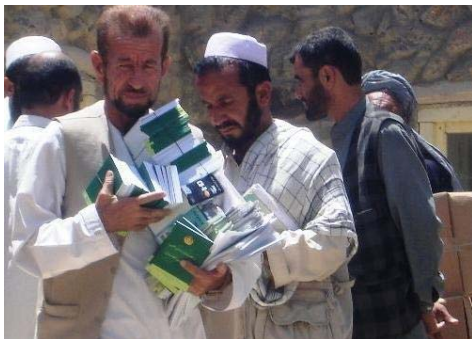
The Movement of Afghan Sisters was formed in 2008 by Afghan women from parliament, the business community, and civil society. The group mobilizes and prepares women to vote in the 2009 presidential elections. In Afghanistan, where women are frequently marginalized, MAS helps women in rural and urban areas to play a role in choosing the leader of their country. Independent Electoral Commission President Dr. Azizullah Lodin heralded the group's work as "the single most important women's initiative for elections in Afghanistan."

Professor Homayra Haqmal accepted the award on the behalf of MAS from U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Ambassador Richard Holbrooke. "Our vision is to organize independent Afghan women so that they can take active part in political, social, economic, and cultural affairs, to take our seat at the table next to all Afghans trying to rebuild our country," she stated in her acceptance speech. Through the work of this important women's organization, Afghanistan's democratic process has become more inclusive, setting the stage for free and fair elections this August.



Ambassador Richard Holbrooke presents the Jeane J. Kirkpatrick Award to Prof. Haqmal.

PHOTO: USAID/CEPPS



CCC volunteers distribute outreach materials about access to justice and women's rights.

PHOTO: USAID/ARoLP

Kunduz Community Cultural Center Opens: Many people in Afghanistan, especially women, do not know their legal rights or how to use the formal justice system. To bridge this gap, USAID has established 34 Community Cultural Centers (CCCs) in six of the country's provinces. The centers rely on trained local volunteers to educate their fellow citizens about their legal rights and how to defend their rights in Afghanistan's formal and informal justice systems. In spring 2009, USAID opened its newest center in Kunduz Province.

The Community Cultural Centers have had a tangible



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

April 15-April 30, 2009

positive impact on the lives of Afghans who seek information and resources there. For example, one center recently helped a young woman leave a forced marriage, legally and with the blessing of her community. Other Afghan citizens have used the centers to prepare successfully for trials in court or to educate themselves about women's rights. Now residents of Kunduz also have access to this essential resource to learn about, and protect, their rights.

ECONOMIC GROWTH

Farah Citizens Benefit from a Marketplace Development Grant:

Residents of Farah City now enjoy safer streets and improved public facilities thanks to a grant from USAID. The marketplace development grant, which is a tool for communities to finance improvements to local public infrastructure, enabled the installation of solar-powered street lights, two traffic circles, and four public rest rooms. Implemented by USAID, the Farah Provincial Reconstruction Team, and the Municipality of Farah, these small infrastructure projects demonstrate how Afghan citizens benefit from cooperative efforts that prioritize local needs and empower communities to guide their own development.



A new traffic circle in Farah City.

PHOTO: USAID/ASMED



The Afghan Marble Conference attracted 120 producers, association members, government officials, and diplomats.

PHOTO: USAID/ASMED

Afghan Marble Conference Promotes Industry Growth:

Afghanistan is home to 60 known deposits of 35 varieties of marble, but the marble industry has remained underdeveloped due to lack of investment, infrastructure, mining capacity, and a regulatory framework. To promote the growth of this emerging sector, USAID, the Afghan Marble and Granite Processors Association (AMGPA), and the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry organized the first Afghan Marble Conference. From March 24-26, 120 national and international marble producers, members of the AMGPA, the Afghan Ministers of Finance, Commerce, and Mines, and international diplomats gathered at the conference to form trade and investment partnerships, as well as to develop a strategy for the industry.

The conference provided opportunities to discuss challenges facing the Afghan marble industry and explore ways to overcome them, and also allowed for networking among



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

April 15-April 30, 2009

producers, investors, and government officials. Additionally, Afghan marble producers benefitted from a technical workshop on improving quarry operations in the country.

The conference was a significant step towards the development and expansion of the Afghan marble industry domestically and abroad. The sector has the potential to generate thousands of jobs and millions of dollars of revenue, providing a valuable product to domestic and international markets and increasing prosperity for Afghan communities.

PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAM

New Bridge Links Four Villages in Nangarhar: A new USAID-funded suspension bridge now connects four remote villages in Nangarhar's Suliman Valley, easing residents' access to essential services such as schools, medical clinics, and markets. Prior to the construction of the bridge, travel between the villages was challenging and time consuming, and flooding often prevented residents from attending school or receiving medical help.



A new bridge provides four villages in Nangarhar with increased access to schools, medical facilities, and markets.

PHOTO: USAID/PRT Jalalabad

A village elder expressed his gratitude for the vastly improved access to schools and work. He explained that before the bridge was built, children could not attend school during flooding months, and residents required hours to get to Jalalabad to work. A resident of Tora Bora also thanked USAID and the Afghan government for the bridge and noted that his trust in the government had grown as a result of its construction. "We thought we were ignored by the local government in the past," he said. "But now when I see the bridge, I realize that the government is committed to development in our area."

Local Stability Initiatives Build Trust and Improve Governance: In southern and eastern Afghanistan, an innovative approach to civilian-military cooperation is strengthening citizens' trust in their government and local military forces while improving rural infrastructure. Local Stability Initiatives (LSI) are community-oriented development projects that build peace and security in remote villages. Afghan community leaders identify the needs of their own villages – such as the construction of a new well or footbridge – and work with USAID and the military to design, fund, and implement the projects.

In Zabul Province, where recent protests led to the appointment of a new Governor, these development projects have already started to build a cooperative relationship among local councils, the Afghan National Army, Coalition Forces, and USAID. In one village, community elders and military representatives toured a series of irrigation wells, known as



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

April 15-April 30, 2009

karezes, to build local support for a karez-cleaning LSI project. Although villagers initially reacted with skepticism, they realized that a community-led karez cleaning would improve irrigation and farming – and that their government, Coalition Forces, and USAID were eager to support their development project.

Building trust between Afghan communities, the government, USAID, and the military is essential in regions where insurgents are also trying to win local support. One U.S. Army Police Mentor stated, "I think most of the people are riding the fence between [supporting] the insurgents or the Government of Afghanistan. With strong Afghan involvement, this USAID program has the potential to be a real game changer in legitimizing the Government of Afghanistan." When the Afghan government provides needed services for its citizens and works with civilian and military representatives to create a secure and prosperous country, it earns the support of its citizens and is one step closer to defeating the insurgency.

Farmer's Day Celebration Connects Farmers with Local Government:

Government officials in the southern province of Uruzgan met with local farmers to identify their needs and challenges at a Farmer's Day event in late March. At the event, over 500 farmers from across the province met with government officials – including the governor and representatives from the Agriculture Directorate – to discuss their achievements, challenges, and goals.

The Government of Uruzgan is committed to helping farmers increase their harvests and income, as agriculture is the primary industry in the region. At the event, government representative Eid Mohammad Khan said, "The goal of this Farmer's Day celebration is for the government to learn about the problems and challenges facing farmers so they can then provide support." The farmers took the opportunity to tell their local officials about water shortages, lack of funds to buy tools and equipment, and poor access to medicine and fertilizer.

Following the discussion, government representatives distributed shovels and saws to the attendees. Additionally, the Governor of Uruzgan announced plans to establish a fruit market, which would raise farmers' income through increased opportunities to sell their crops.



Uruzgan farmers discuss their challenges and goals with local government officials.

PHOTO: USAID/PRT Tirin Kot



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

AFGHANISTAN

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

April 15-April 30, 2009

ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT AND AGRICULTURE

Natural Resource Management Training for Government Employees:

From the forests of Nuristan Province to the mountains of the Hindu Kush, Afghanistan is a geographically diverse country rich in natural resources. However, local communities often lack the knowledge to manage those natural resources, protect the environment, and preserve biodiversity in their districts.

To increase local capacity for natural resources management, USAID recently held a 10-day training program for employees of the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) and the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA). During the program, participants learned how to plan and monitor natural resources management projects, and visited Qa'le-ye Quadzi village to develop a case study and apply their new knowledge. This training complements a series of initiatives to enforce environmental protection laws, provide public education on biodiversity and green practices, and strengthen the capacity of NEPA – all leading to a sustainable, healthy natural environment in Afghanistan.



Director Nasrullah Bakhtani of MAIL's Monitoring and Evaluation Division reports his group's findings.

PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan